

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /040 W  
----- 039524

R 090951Z SEP 76  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4104  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 6261

E.O.11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT TS  
SUBJECT: MOHAMED SAYAH WEAKENED IN PSD COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
APPOINTMENTS

1. AT COMPLETION OF REGULAR BI-ANNUAL ELECTIONS TO RENEW THE DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY'S COORDINATING COMMITTEES, THE PSD POLITICAL BUREAU ANNOUNCED THE PARTY'S APPOINTMENT OF NEW SECRETARIES GENERAL FOR NINE OF THE COMMITTEES. (THERE ARE 18 COMMITTEES--ONE FOR EACH GOVERNORATE--AND NINE OF THE PREVIOUS SECRETARIES GENERAL REMAINED IN OFFICE.) THESE COORDINATING COMMITTEES SERVE AS THE PRINCIPAL PARTY APPARATUS BELOW THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND ARE IMPORTANT MECHANISMS FOR EXERCISING POLITICAL CONTROL AND FOR MARSHALLING LOCAL SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED. AS BOURGUIBA'S DAY-TO-DAY HOLD ON DECISION MAKING CONTINUES TO WEAKEN, THEY HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT AS POTENTIAL POWER BASES. THE PERSON WHO CONTROLS THE COMMITTEES WHEN THE TIME COMES, WILL HAVE A DECIDED ADVANTAGE BOTH WITHIN THE PARTY AND WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, OVER OTHER RIVALS FOR POWER. IN THE PAST, PARTY DIRECTOR MOHAMED SAYAH HAS BEEN THE UNDISPUTED BOSS OF THESE COMMITTEES. THIS DOMINANCE NOW HAS BEEN CHALLENGED, EVIDENTLY WITH REAL SUCCESS. A NUMBER OF SAYAH'S LIEUTENANTS WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR POSITIONS AS SECRETARY GENERAL AND REPLACED BY MEN WHO APPEAR TO BE MORE CLOSELY

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TIED TO PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA. OF NOTABLE IMPORTANCE, SAYAH

LOST CONTROL OF THE KEY COORDINATING COMMITTEES IN  
MONASTIR AND IN TUNIS.

2. THIS POWER SHIFT WITHIN PARTY STRUCTURE HAS BEEN  
ACCOMPANIED BY OTHER DEVELOPMENTS GIVING FURTHER EVIDENCE  
THAT SAYAH'S POSITION IS WEAKENING. PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA  
APPARENTLY TOOK PERSONAL ROLE IN NAMING THE NEW SECRETARY  
GENERAL FOR THE TUNIS COORDINATING COMMITTEE, AND HE ALSO  
TOOK THE UNPRECEDENTED STEP OF PRESIDING OVER INSTALLATION  
OF THIS APPOINTEE. IN NATIONALLY TELEVISED SPEECH GIVEN  
AT CEREMONY, NOUIRA WAS CRITICAL OF BACKROOM POLITICKING  
DURING CAMPAIGN AND PERSONAL RIVALRIES, REMARKS WHICH HAVE  
BEEN INTERPRETED AS BEING DIRECTED AT SAYAH AND HIS  
CLIQUE. A LEAD AEDITORIAL IN PARTY DAILY L'ACTION ALSO  
CHARGED, IN GENERAL TERMS, THAT "PERSONS" IN SENIOR PARTY  
POSITION HAD NOT BEEN WORTHY OF TRUST PLACED IN THEM  
AND INTIMATED THAT PUNISHMENT WAS BOTH MERITED AND  
IMMINENT. SENIOR PARTY POSITONS HAD HERETOFORE BEEN  
LARGELY CONTROLLED BY SAYAH, AND REMOVAL OF SEVERAL OF  
HIS UPPORTERS IN KEY COORDINATWNG COMMITTEE JOBS GIVES  
FURTHER INDICATION THAT SAYAH IS THE OBJECT OF THESE  
OBSERVATIONS.

3. WHILE IT WOULD BE AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION TO SAY THAT  
THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE ELECTIONS/NOMINATIONS REPRESENT  
A DIRECT NOUIRA-SAYAH CONFRONTATION, WE DO KNOW THAT RELA-  
TIONS AMONG THE TWO MEN ARE NOT GOOD, AND THAT EACH SEES  
THE OTHER AS A RIVAL FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE. BOTH HAVE  
BEEN MANEUVERING FOR SUPPORT FROM OTHER POWERFUL ALLIES FOR  
SOME TIME. THE RESULTING CONFLICT WHICH RAGED AT SENIOR  
PARTY LEVELS IN MAY, JUNE, AND JULY (SEE TUNIS 3866 AND  
5002) WAS MUTED BY THE ANNUAL AUGUST EXODUS AND BY RAMADAN  
SLOWDOWN WHICH FOLLOWED, BUT CAN NOW BE EXPECTED TO BE  
REKINDLED WITH EVERYBODY'S RETURN FROM BEACH AND EUROPENA  
VACATIONS. ISSUE THAT PROVOKED THIS CONFLICT, I.E., WHO  
WILL CONTROL PARTY AS BOURGUIBA ERA DRAWS CLOSER TO ITS  
INEVITABLE END, REMAINS. JUDGING FROM NOUIRA'S APPARENT  
EFFORTS TO GAIN CONTROL IN THE TUNIS COORDINATING COMMITTEE,  
THE PRIME MINISTER MAY HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE A CONCERTED MOVE TO  
MASTER THE CONFLICT BY MOVING TO CURB SAYAH'S POWER ALSO IN  
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BOROADER SENSE.

4. WITH TUNISIA STILL RUNNING AT HALF-THROTTLE DURING  
RAMADAN, IT IS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE WHAT LASTING EFFECT  
THIS POWER SHIFT IN THE COORDINATING COMMITTES WILL HAVE  
WITHIN THE PARTY, BUT WE NOTE THAT THIS IS FIRST OCCASION  
IN WHICH NOUIRA HAS MOVED INTO PUBLIC ARENA TO EXERCISE  
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN PSD. THIS WILL CERTAINLY RESULT

IN RETHINKING BY HIS OPPONENTS AND DETRACTORS. SUPPOSEDLY NOUIRA ENJOYS PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S SUPPORT, WHICH WOULD BE ESSENTIAL TO ANY CHANCES OF LONG-RANGE SUCCESS HE MAY HAVE. HE ALSO IS SAID TO BE WORKING IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH INTERIOR MINISTER TAHAR BELKHODJA AND WITH EDUCATION MINISTER MOHAMED MZALI, EITHER ONE OF WHOM MAY HAVE ASPIRATIONS OF BEING THE KING MAKER, IF NOT THE KING HIMSELF.  
MULCAHY

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** PARTY ORGANIZATION, COMMITTEES, PARTY LEADERS, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 09 SEP 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** BoyleJA  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976TUNIS06261  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D760340-0955  
**From:** TUNIS  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1976/newtext/t19760975/aaaacmrq.tel  
**Line Count:** 124  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION NEA  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** BoyleJA  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 21 APR 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by CollinP0>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** MOHAMED SAYAH WEAKENED IN PSD COORDINATING COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS  
**TAGS:** PINT, TS, DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006